

On the law of appellatives in Greek and Vedic: Markedness and transcategorization

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1. Introduction

In Ancient Greek and Old Indian nominal systems, the position of the accent distinguishes minimal pairs with a shared root or, more precisely, two different semantic results of the same lexeme (Vendryès, 1945, 148ff.) formed by:

1) Abstract *vs.* concrete: Gr. λευκός “white”: λεῦκος name of a fish: “the white”; fem. ψωρά “scaly”: ψώρα “scabies” etc.; Skr. *rudhira-* “red”: *rúdhira-* “blood”; *kṛṣṇás* “black”: *kṛṣṇas* “black antelope and pr. n. *Kṛṣṇas*” etc. and, with oxytonia and barytonesis inverted Gr. ἰλάρη “lively”: ἰλαρή “a medication”; δέξαμένη < δέχομαι “accept”, “receive” (partic. aor.): δεξαμένη “cistern”) etc.; Skr. *súkrta-* “well-done/made”: *sukṛtá* “good action, devotion”; *ásita-* “black”: *asitá-* “black snake”. Oppositions between neutral and animate gender nouns such as Gr. ψευδος: ψευδής, Skr. *ápas-* n. “work”: *apás-* (nom. *apás*) “laborious” are, instead, of a different type: in fact, they do not form minimal pairs; moreover, here the barytonesis might depend on the grammatical gender: «Das Neutrum» wrote Wackernagel (1957, p. 20) «hat Neigung für Baritonese». These latter opposition will not be discussed at the moment.

2) Barytone action nouns *vs.* oxytone agent or instrument nouns: Gr. τόμος “cut”: τομός “that cuts”, τρόχος “a run”: τροχός “that runs, rotates” etc. and, with the accent inverted, feminine pairs like καμπή “a bend”: κάμπη “belt, caterpillar”; ἄρπαγή “robbery”: ἀρπάγη “spear” etc.; Skr.: *éṣa-* “a hurry”: *eṣá-* “hurried”; *kāma-* “love”: *kāmá-* “lover”; *śāśa-* “command, order”: *śāśá-* “commander, master” etc. These

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oppositions can be assimilated into those of group 1) because the agent noun, “halb-adjectiv” as Wackernagel defines it (1957, p. 19), may be assimilated to the adjective with which it shares some properties: «nomina agentis are often adjectives comparable in function to participles» (Lubotsky, 1988, p. 60)¹. It is worth remarking that agent nouns may also designate instruments (cfr. English. *condensor*, *charger*, *mixer*) represented as agents and that action nouns may also express the concrete result of the action, as in Italian *operazione* “surgery”, etc.

3) Oxytone common noun or adjective *vs.* barytone proper name: Gr. ἀστήρ “star”: Ἄστηρ “Star”; καρπός “fruit” and Κάρπος; διογενής “sprung from Zeus”: Διογένης etc.; γλαυκός “cerulean”: Γλαῦκος, etc. (Vendryès, 1945) and, with oxytonia and barytonesis inverted: ἀμφοτέρος “either”: Ἀμφοτερός; ἄξιος “worth”: Ἄξιος; σκύμνος “cub”: Σκυμνός; σφζόμενος < σώζω “save”, “preserve” (partic. aor.): Σφζομένος; δεξάμενος < δέχομαι “accept”, “receive” (partic. aor.): Δεξαμένος “pr. n.”. Oppositions such as Gr. ῥίνη “file, rasp”: ῥινή “a fish” (Herodian. I, 333, 9)² may be included into the same group. Old Indian does not provide examples of this kind of alternations.

4) Nominal case (of adjective or noun) *vs.* adverb: úttara- “northern, left”: *uttarāt* “from the north, from the left”; áma- “this one”: *amāt* “from nearby”; sána- “ancient, old”: *sanāt* “from ancient times, forever”; and, with the oxytone adverb, *divā*, str. sing. of *div* “day”: *dīvā* “in the day” etc. Greek also provides evidence of this kind of alternations: e.g. «les neutres ἀληθές ἐπιτηδές employés adverbialement devenaient proparoxytons chez les Attiques» (Vendryès, 1945, 226ff., where also other cases are discussed).

5) Nominative *vs.* vocative: the accent is retracted in the vocative relative to the nominative: Skr. sing. nom. *pitā* “father”: voc. *pítar*; Skr. plur. nom. *pitáras*: voc. *pítaras* etc. In Sanskrit, the retraction of the accent is systematic: the position of the accent is the distinctive feature distinguishing the vocative from the nominative in plural minimal

¹ More so with adjectives than with participles: agent nouns, like adjectives and unlike participles, do not encode the relationship with the main verb nor is it sensitive to time-aspect distinction. It is worth noticing that Lubotsky (1988, 24ff.) explicitly excludes from his treatment proper names and words «belonging to categories where the accentuation is determined by semantic criteria», that is, exactly, the cases discussed here.

² Or, rather, is it to be included in group 1)? The noun “file, rasp” attributed to a fish has a qualificative value. This is not so if a common noun works as proper name. In this case, rather, there is “reversed iconicity”, in the sense given in Fabrizio (2013) (see also below).

pairs, semiminimal in the singular. In Greek, the retraction is residual: the alternation is sporadic in the singular (πατήρ: πάτερ; Ζεύς: Ζεῦ etc.), neutralized in the plural: nom. and voc. πατέρες (Schwyzer, 1959, p. 547)³.

2. The “law of appellatives”: a scale of nouniness?

In the few pairs of the first three groups where the adjective or the common noun are barytone, the position of the accent of the noun or the proper name is inverted (σκύμνος: Σκυμνός); we have already mentioned a few examples. In fact, it does not count that one category (e.g. the adjective) is oxytone and the other (e.g. the corresponding concrete noun) is barytone. What counts is that one is accented in a different way from the other. The so-called “law of appellatives” of Greek and Sanskrit that, in Vendryès’ formulation, applies to the distinction between adjective and noun (or rather, between qualifier and appellative), prescribes exactly this, provided that «ces peuvent parfois se confondre avec ceux où se manifeste l’opposition de l’abstrait et du concret» (Vendryès, 1945, p. 153; see the alternations listed at point 2).

But what do these pairs have in common? Oppositions between common nouns and proper names, such as Gr. ἄστηρ: Ἄστηρ, between nominal cases and adverbs, such as Skr. *uttarāt*: *úttara*- and between nominative and vocative can be interpreted as oppositions between abstract and concrete with difficulty. It still remains unsettled whether a unitary principle underlies these alternations.

Let us consider the observation that most of the pairs included in the first three groups share a feature: the referential force of one term is greater than the referential force of the other, where ‘referential force’ refers to the position that the contextual manifestation of a noun occupies in the anymacy and individuation hierarchies relative to the prototypical noun: higher degree of animacy and individuation = higher referential force; mass nouns and abstract nouns = lower referential force (Simone, 2006, 90ff.).

³ It is coherent that the neutralization of the opposition (manifested in the syncretism of the nominative with the vocative) starts in the plural: the most frequent and unmarked manifestations of the vocative – prototypical site of the proper name – are in the singular. The syncretism begins in the most peripheral (less prototypical) positions (examples in Lazzeroni, 2013). The nominative is the unmarked form (Donati, 2013, p. 112), that occurs in the syncretism.

On this issue Ross (1972) applied a set of syntactic tests, whose results outline a crosslinguistic valid hierarchy, to English noun phrases (Taylor, 1995, p. 192) and showed that noun phrases are ordered on a scale of referential force where the prototypical noun phrases are those that refer to volitional entities having a high degree of time stability, that is, first and foremost, human beings. Lower positions on the scale are taken by the noun phrases that refer to concrete inanimate entities, followed by those referring to events and abstract notions. Overall, the referential force of nouns is higher than the referential force of adjectives, that of proper nouns (which are both human and high in individuation) higher than that of common nouns, and that of agent nouns, which refer to human and concrete entities, and common nouns higher than that of abstract nouns.

However, if the change of the accent only signalled a variation in the referential force, it would be difficult to understand why it is found in pairs of adjective and adverb where the referential force is not relevant, and why the accent position does not change in the Greek adjective nominalized through the article (οἱ κακοί “the bad people”), whereas it does in deadjectival nouns, that is, the adjectives used as either proper names or nouns with whatsoever referent (κακός “bad”: Κάκος “pr. n.”; λεῦκος “white fish”; Λεῦκος “pr. n.”, as opposed to λευκός “white”). Even if the deadjectival noun is “more nouny” than the nominalized adjective, as shown by the fact that the latter does not admit gradation, while the former does, (οἱ κάκιστοι; οἱ ἄριστοι etc.), it is clear that also the referential force of the type οἱ κακοί is greater than the referential force of the adjective κακός. However, the observation that only in the deadjectival noun the accent changes its position leads us to suppose that in the nominalized adjective the qualificative function continues to be dominant, whereas in the deadjectival nouns the referential function represents the main feature. In the first case, then, the adjective remains an adjective, although its function is not prototypical (rather, one may even ask whether the nominalized adjective actually represents the elliptical version of an adjectival compound: e.g., οἱ κακοὶ [πολίται], in which the adjective is a modifier); in the other case, it is converted into a noun. Undoubtedly, the position of the accent operates as a distinctive feature of the two word classes of adjective and noun, rather than of different uses of the adjective: in Greek, a barytone noun becomes oxytone in the rare cases in which it functions as an adjective: ἀσφόδελος “asphodel”, but ἀσφοδελός “full of asphodels” and, in Greek and in Sanskrit, the barytone agent nouns in *-tr* (Skr. *-tr*-, Gr. *-τωρ*), the only ones in *-tr* that express a higher

degree of time stability and individuation, are “more nouny”⁴ than the oxytones (Skr. *-tṛ-*, Gr. *-τήρ*; Lazzeroni, 1997, 2008, 2010; Tichy, 1995): the oxytone nouns in *-tṛ-* “sind mehr participiale (Einzelfall), die Barytona mehr nominale (Substantivisch)” (Debrunner, 1954, p. 683). Moreover, it is not by chance that in Grassmann’s Vedic dictionary the latter are classified as participles⁵.

However, if the accent variation only marked the noun/adjective distinction, this variation would remain obscure when it applies to proper nouns as opposed to common nouns, to the vocative case as opposed to the nominative and to adverb as opposed to nouns. If that were the case, how could we account for pairs like Sanskrit locative adverb *paré* “in the future”: adjective *páre* (locative case of *pára-* “distant”), ablative adverb *adharāt* “under”: adjective *ádharāt* (ablative case of *ádhara-* “low”)? Further examples might be mentioned.

One might suppose that adverbs fossilized the original position of the accent, which changed in both nouns and adjectives, as an outcome of paradigmatic analogy (Delbrück, 1893, 541ff.). This is possible in several cases, but besides the fact that traces of accent variation appear also in other configurations in Greek (Delbrück, 1893, 542 cites ἐπιζάφελος; ἐπιζαφελῶς; ταχύς; τάχα etc., in which the etymology of *-a* is uncertain: is this an ancient nominative case? Schwyzer, 1959, p. 622), a similar explanation does not account for Skr. *divā* “during the day”: in this case, the position of the accent is not original in the paroxytone instrumental adverb, whereas it is original in the oxytone noun, as is the norm in weak cases of monosyllables: loc. *diví*, dat. *divé*, gen./abl. *divás* and instrumental, indeed, *divā* (Renou, 1952, p. 327).

The etymological issue is not relevant from a synchronic perspective: synchronically, the position of the accent in the noun and the adjective is different from the position of the accent in the adverb.

3. *Markedness: a difficult definition*

Let us consider the following argument: the prototypical adjective is gradable and agrees in gender, number and case with the noun; when used as deadjectival noun, instead, it is not gradable and does not undergo agreement rules.

⁴ In Greek only the barytones can form proper nouns and only the oxytones appear in non-referential phrases, typical adjectival sites: “nobody is as generous as Caesar” is grammatical, but “*nobody is as generous as Caesar” is not.

⁵ See M, 170: ἄνδρες θηρητήρες; “adjectival”, rather than “participial”; see note 1.

Prototypical properties of nouns are quantification, individuation, the so-called “ostensibility”, topicality, grammatical number and time stability; a noun used as denominal adjective, instead, (this is the above-mentioned case, of ἀσφόδελος: ἀσφοδελός) is not numerable, ostensible or stable in time; if used as idionym, it is neither numerable nor quantifiable (other peculiarities in Fabrizio, 2013); nouns and adjectives that form adverbs partly or totally lose their typical morphosyntactic properties: adjectives lose agreement, gender and grammatical number; nouns lose quantification, grammatical number, ostensibility and time stability.

Since these are considered clues of markedness together with the reduction of the semantic extension, it is useful to ask whether the different position of the accent is related to distinctions in the markedness dimension.

But, if it is held to be true that «capturing exactly what markedness means is by no means a straightforward task» (Rice, 2003, p. 390), how can markedness be defined?

Haspelmath (2006, p. 63) proposed to replace the term “markedness” with other terms that designate what is more complex and increases the degree of difficulty in the execution and conceptualization, «but since complexity and difficulty typically lead to lower frequency, abnormality is in effect what all markedness senses share». Frequency, then, would be an epiphenomenon distinguishing between more normal and less normal forms, which are usually called “marked”.

However, besides the vagueness of the notion of normality, one may ask to what extent the frequency rate of the written documents is reliable, without the control of the oral language, especially when they are not numerous (as in the cases examined here), and differences in the number of the documented forms may depend on either chance or pragmatic circumstances.

4. *Beyond markedness: graded categories between prototypes and peripheries*

It has been observed that the prototypical status of a word within its own grammatical category may depend on the context; prototypical properties manifest completely only in certain contexts (Hopper, Thompson, 1984): unlike, for example, what happens in the Italian phrase *ho catturato una volpe rossa* “I have captured a red fox”, in which *volpe* “fox” is referential and the number distinction is active,

the distinction is, instead, neutralized in the phrase *ho partecipato alla caccia alla volpe* “I took part in fox hunting” in which *volpe* “fox” is not referential and the meaning of the construction does not change if the singular is replaced by the plural (*caccia alle volpi*).

So, it has been shown that in the pairs mentioned above one of the two terms reduces the number of its distinctive properties: the adjective used as deadjectival noun, for instance, loses gradability; the noun used as denominalized adjective loses number distinction, etc.

It is useful, then, to ask whether we can better define the notion of markedness by representing the lexical classes as graded categories, in Rosch’s terms (1973), and replacing the notion of markedness with the largely coincident (Ludwig, 2001) and more recognisable notion of prototypicality. The prototype of a given category is defined by a set of properties whose number decreases and gives way to the properties of the contiguous categories in a pattern ordered from the centre to the periphery of the category (Croft, 1990, 124ff.), as happens, indeed, in the cases considered so far. In summary, the functional opposition is not between an unmarked function (the prototype) and a marked one, but between an unmarked function and *progressively* more marked functions.

A Croft’s (1990, p. 141; italics are mine) definition is useful for the present argument: «the markedness pattern that Dixon identified with adjectives, and which is found in nouns and verbs, represents a semantic class as unmarked *with respect to a particular function*». Effectively, the notion of markedness does not apply to the lexical class, but to its function: the prototype of a lexical class is manifested in the constructions in which it takes on its prototypical function: as regards the noun category, reference, numerability, etc.; as regards the adjective category, modification; as regards the verb category, predication. The prototypical function is central, the other functions are at the periphery of the category, where its boundaries fade into the boundaries of the contiguous categories.

This is exactly what happens in the Greek and Vedic cases in which the accent moves: the adjective used as deadjectival noun loses the adjectival property of modification and acquires the nominal properties of reference and numerability; nouns and adjectives used as adverbs lose their properties of reference and noun modification, respectively, and acquire verb or adjective modification (on the properties of adverbs, see Givón, 2001, 87ff.); nouns used as denominalized adjectives lose the nominal properties and acquire the adjectival property of modification. Croft (1990, p. 142) represents the

prototypical (in bold) and the peripheral functions of the main classes in this table:

TABLE 1

	Reference	Modification	Predication
<i>Objects</i>	unmarked nouns	genitive, compounds	predicate nominals
<i>Properties</i>	deadjectivals nouns	unmarked adjectives	predicate adjectives
<i>Actions</i>	nominalizations, omplements, infinitives, gerunds	participles, relative clauses	unmarked verbs

Our interim conclusion is, therefore, that in Greek and in Vedic the movement of the accent encodes the transcategorization⁶ of a constituent of a given lexical class that has a non-prototypical function: it is worth remarking that graded categories, which are ordered around a prototype (“fuzzy categories”, in a common definition), have fuzzy boundaries, so that it frequently happens that the non-prototypical use of a constituent determines its transfer into an adjacent category: «The notion of ‘prototype’ (also including the concept of ‘family resemblances’) viewed as a continuum is crucial for this typological approach. If we accept this approach the often asked question “where is the cut-off point between two categories?” is not appropriate: there are not clear-cut boundaries between adjacent categories» (Ramat, 2014, p. 13).

However, at a first glance, this does not seem to apply to the movement of the accent in the vocative and in the common noun used as proper noun. As regards proper nouns, one may invoke the analogy with the adjectives, which move the accent in identical conditions. But actual facts are different: also in this case, the move of the accent may be attributed to transcategorization. Andersen (2001, p. 14), discussing the anomalous behaviour of proper nouns

⁶ Here and in the following “transcategorization” is used in a broad sense: unlike typical cases of transcategorization, here the passage from one lexical category to another is encoded into a formal feature, that is the movement of the accent (for a more general discussion, see Ježek, Ramat, 2009).

in the cancellation of the bicasual system in French (Schösler, 2001)⁷ observes: «This suggests the possibility that personal names may be categorized (in some languages or universally) as a subclass of pronouns». Discussing the extensive bibliography is impossible here. I shall report the chief results of a recent study by Fabrizio (2013, p. 47): «le riflessioni contenute in questo lavoro suggeriscono piuttosto che i np (nomi propri: nota mia), pur appartenendo in pieno al lessico di una lingua, siano una classe di parole distinta sia da quella dei nomi comuni che da quella dei pronomi», so as «l'individualità dei np rispetto alle altre classi di parole getta luce anche sulle curiose anomalie che li riguardano ad ogni livello di analisi, e persino sui processi di mutamento diacronico che li coinvolgono: il modo anomalo in cui rispondono al mutamento resistendovi o, viceversa, recependolo anticipatamente, può spiegarsi forse meglio se li si considera una classe di parole a sé» (Fabrizio, 2013, p. 49). Neither is it without meaning that on a semiotic level the relationship between the noun and the named entity has a sort of reversed iconicity, as Fabrizio (2013, p. 12) defines it: «diversamente dall'iconicità classica e 'diretta' secondo cui la parola rispecchia caratteristiche intrinseche della cosa significata, nella pratica onomaturgica è il *designatum* che acquista (o gli si augura di acquistare, ma poco importa la differenza; nota mia) proprietà del significato del nome». Therefore, also on the semiotic level, the function of proper names is marked and non prototypical relative to common nouns. In summary, proper names are similar to a certain extent to personal pronouns, but less suitable for anaphoric uses and, unlike pronouns, belong to an extendable repertoire; in addition, they are referential like common nouns, but uncountable and non suitable for pluralization, iconic like nouns, but with reversed iconicity and so on: thus, they appear to belong to an autonomous category situated at the intersection between the noun and the pronoun categories. Therefore, also the movement of the accent may encode transcategorization as a byproduct of a non-prototypical use of nouns.

Finally, the case of vocative. The vocative entails an animate and individuated referent; in a recent monography, Donati (2013) describes the vocative as a “commutator of referentiality” in the sense that it inserts a second person deixis into the noun class and, therefore, transforms the inherently non-deictic referentiality of nouns into deictic referentiality, by linking it to the extralinguistic context of the

⁷ Proper names lose inflectional cases before common nouns and, unlike common nouns, preserve nominative rather than oblique case.

speech act (Donati, 2013, pp. 89 ss.): essentially, the vocative, which is marked compared to the nominative (Donati, 2013, pp. 110 ss.), non-relational and asymmetric with respect to the case system (“erratische Blöcke im Satzfeld” as Bühler, 1934, 341ff. defined the vocative and the interjections), moves a noun to a different category from the proper one to the other nominal cases: in Sanskrit and in Hittite, a neutral noun, typically inanimate, takes the marker of animate gender when used in the vocative (Lazzeroni, 1995).

On the same lines, some scholars have described the vocative as an invariable element of a deictic nominal paradigm of second person, as opposed to the “neutral” paradigm that is not deictic with respect to the person (Harweg, 1967; Conte, 1972)⁸; if it is held to be true that in the reclassification of the more prototypical members of the anymacy/individuation hierarchy (or empathy hierarchy, as Lehmann, 1997, defines it) the allocutive nominal forms take the second position, after the first and second person pronouns (Donati, 2013, 91ff.) and before the third person pronouns and proper names, also the retraction of the accent in the vocative is, then, related to transcategorization: just as proper names relative to common nouns and adjectives, a noun in the vocative seems to belong to a different morphosyntactic category from a noun in the nominative or in the other cases⁹, such a category included in the inflectional paradigm by *horror vacui grammaticorum*.

In summary, the vocative – which is deictic like personal pronouns, represents the prototypical site of proper names, is animate and individuated like proper names – is situated in the deictic space of the

⁸ «Vergegenwärtigen wir uns zunächst, dass dem DRITTERPERSONIGEN PRONOMINALEN Deklinationstypus *er, seiner, ihm, ihn* – ebenfalls als dritterpersonig zu klassifizierende – NOMINALE Deklinationstypus *der Mann, er / (des Mannes, seiner/) dem Mann, ihm / den Mann, ihn*, oder *Karl, der / Karls, dessen / Karl, dem / Karl, den* gegenübergestellt werden kann. Dann müsste es palusibel sein, wenn wir nunmehr ebenso dem ZWEITPERSONIGEN PRONOMINALEN Deklinationstypus *du / deiner / dir / dich* einen entsprechenden NOMINALEN zweitpersonigen Deklinationstypus, un zwar in der Form *du, Fritz / deiner, Fritz / dir, Fritz / dich, Frit bzw. Karl, du / Karl, deiner / Karl, dir / Karl, dich* an die Seite stellen» (Harweg, 1967, p. 44; also important footnote n. 19).

⁹ Hjelmslev (1935, 96ff.) speaks about the exclusion of the vocative from the category of cases; see the discussion in Donati (2013, p. 139), with the following conclusions: «il vocativo sarà da considerarsi un elemento estraneo ai casi sul piano funzionale, ma con essi sistematizzato [...] perché la lingua è in grado di inserire nelle opposizioni paradigmatiche della grammatica elementi semanticamente e funzionalmente diversi fra loro»: basically, elements belonging to functionally different morphosyntactic categories.

second person pronouns and in the referential space of proper names, rather than in the relational system of the other cases and, as opposed to the nominative, shares the accent features with proper names.

5. Conclusions

The results of the study of minimal (seldom semi-minimal) pairs show that the accent moves when one of the two terms belongs to either a lexical or a morphosyntactic category different from the category of the other, but it does not move when, despite the non-prototypical (marked, in Croft's sense) use, it does not cancel the basic properties of the category which the noun belongs to (οἱ γλαυκοί "those with cerulean eyes", not *οἱ γλαῦκοι, but Γλαῦκος; οἱ ἀγαθοί "the optimised"; cfr. καλοὶ κᾶγαθοί, not *οἱ ἀγάθοι, but Ἀγάθη etc.; the same happens when an action noun is used in a concrete sense: Gr. θέσις "deposition" and "deposit"; Skr. *vasatī* "inhabiting" and "the nest" etc.).

Thus, the variation of the accent encodes transcategorization (which implies a variation in referentiality and individuation of most but not all of the affected forms). However, it remains unsettled whether this is an epiphenomenon of a different function. In fact, if it is held to be true that the prototype of a lexeme - its unmarked manifestation - is defined by a set of graded properties that the more they decrease, in function and number, the more one proceeds from the centre to the periphery of the respective categories, then the notion of non-prototypicality – largely corresponding to Croft's notion of markedness – establishes a gradient where the distance from the prototype and the closeness to the boundaries – that is, the degree of markedness – are defined by the number of functionally reduced or cancelled prototypical properties; consequently, as shown above, when two categories fade into each other and the reduction or cancellation of the distinctive properties of one category parallel the acquisition of the distinctive properties of the other, the transcategorization is an epiphenomenon of the degree of markedness. Therefore, if we take markedness as a manifestation of the prototypical nature of lexical categories and lexical categories as categories with blurred boundaries (fuzzy categories), we can conclude that the variation of the accent in minimal or semiminimal pairs in Greek and Sanskrit encodes a high degree of markedness (i.e., distance from the prototype), which determines the conversion of the constituent of a lexical/morphosyntactic category into the constituent of a different lexical/morphosyntactic category.

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